DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 837 SP 014 617

AUTHOR Ryan, Kevin
TITLE Some Feedback Is Better Than Others: Implications of a Study of First Year Teachers for the Follow Up of Teacher Education Graduates.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 20p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, California, April 8-12, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; Evaluation Methods; Experience; *Feedback; *Followup Studies; Success Factors; Surveys; Teacher Education; *Teacher Morale; *Teaching

ABSTRACT

The conditions that surround a beginning teacher's first year of employment profoundly affect the level of professional competency that a teacher is able to develop and maintain in later positions. A survey of 18 first-year teachers from diverse institutional backgrounds revealed that beginning teachers have poor subjective judgment concerning their own teaching ability, often find their professional capabilities severely influenced by personal matters, and can feel both socially and professionally isolated in the classroom. A feedback system designed to provide teacher educators with more realistic assessments of beginning teachers' difficulties is one way to aid in effectual design of preservice programs and to provide constructive criticism for the new inservice teacher. (LH)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED175837

# SOME FEEDBACK IS BETTER THAN OTHERS: IMPLICATIONS OF A STUDY OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS FOR THE FOLLOW UP OF TEACHER EDUCATION GRADUATES

by
Kevin Ryan
Professor of Education
The Ohio State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Kevin Ryan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the 1979 American Educational Research annual meeting, San Francisco, California, April 11, 1979.

SP 014 617

DRAFT

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Since the early 1930's, when E. L. Thorndike (1932, 1935) and his colleagues reported the results of their experiments, educators have shown a strong interest in the principle of feedback in learning. In one experiment, Thorndike showed how feedback on performance aided blindfolded subjects draw a line of a specified length. In another experiment, with Lorge, subjects learned how to toss a ball at a target which they weren't able to see. Again, feedback was crucial to learning.

Preservice teachers are taught the value of feedback for learning in educational psychology courses and the concept is built into their programs, in such activities as microteaching and student teaching. However, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is limited resources, teacher education programs have used feedback for their own learning and improvement only on a limited basis. Having tossed their graduates out of the schools, programs have rarely followed up their graduates

to see if their training is on target. As a result, teacher educators use only the most impressionistic knowledge of results with which to evaluate and revise their programs.

In recent years the Nation Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and other agencies have been urging teacher education institutions to conduct follow up studies of their graduates. It is the author's impression that what little follow up is carried out is done by means of paper and pencil questionnaires and occasionally an accompanying on-site visit. This paper is addressed to these follow up study practices, particularly as they pertain to first year teachers.

Normally when a new teacher begins her first teaching assignment she is cut off, both physically and psychologically, from the college or university where she trained. She is on her own. As a first year teacher, she may receive two or three classroom visitations by and conferences with administrators. However, she rarely receives any special help to aid in the transition from student of

teaching to teacher. Based on the belief that the first year of teaching is a year of intense learning and that it is pivotal to the professional development of the teacher, a group of seven of us* designed and executed a study of first year teachers. The purpose was not to follow up on the graduates of one program. Nor was it to test and develop methodologies for following up on graduates of teacher education programs. Our purpose was to find out what happens in the life space of first year teachers. In the words of Frances Fuller and Oliver Bown (1975), we are attempting to find out, "what's out there?" We wanted to capture as much of the experience of first year teachers as we could and chart the dimensions of that experience. On the other hand, the purpose of this paper is to draw out from the experience of our study directions and suggestions which may be of use to those working on the problem of how to follow up graduates of education programs, particularly during their initial year after graduation

*Dr. Jane Applegate, Mr. Randall Flora, Dr. John Johnston, Dr. Thomas Lasley, Dr. Gerald Mager, Dr. Katherine Newman and Dr. Kevin Ryan.

DESCRIPTION OF FIRST YEAR TEACHER STUDY

Our study attempted to find out what happened in the life space of eighteen first year teachers. We developed five questions which guided our research. They are:

1. What are the first year teacher's perceptions of himself or herself?
2. What are the first year teacher's perceptions of himself or herself as a teacher?
3. What happens in the classroom and in other parts of the school that the new teacher perceives as successes or as failures?
4. What are the new teacher's perceptions of students, administrators, fellow teachers, their teacher educators, and parents?
5. What changes occur in these perceptions that in the lives of first year teachers or the course of the year?

We decided that for the type of study we had in mind, we needed eighteen first year teachers. We wanted these teachers to be teaching throughout the grades from kindergarten to twelfth grade in a variety of settings (urban, suburban, rural and public, parochial and private schools) to reflect the distribution of males and females in the teaching population, to be teaching in a variety of areas from academic to vocational, from regular classrooms to special education classes. We also hoped to include a representative number of minority group teachers. We were, in general, successful on all accounts, except two. Although we had urban schools, we had no first year teachers in classrooms serving the extremes of the urban poor. Second, although we asked minority group teachers to participate, none volunteered. In order to get our sample of eighteen volunteer teacher-subjects, we had to ask thirty-six.

The eighteen teachers in our sample came from nine different teacher training institutions and they were teaching in sixteen different

schools. One teacher, a middle-aged trade and industrial teacher taught carpentry for a month and decided to go back to his trade full time. A second teacher left her position after approximately three months, went home and took up another teaching job close to home later in the Spring.

The seven researchers assigned themselves to individual teachers for investigation, with each researcher assigned to certain teachers. These assignments were kept through the academic year, and as the study continued, so have the assignments.

Our method of investigation had two main features: one, five structured interviews scheduled before, during and after the first year. The interviews took anywhere from forty minutes to an hour and a half to complete. These were taped, and then later summarized on cards. Second, we regularly observed the first year teachers, starting with their second day with their classes and extending throughout the year. These two major approaches gave us first, the

first year teacher's view of what she was doing and what was happening to her; and the second, the observations, gave us an opportunity to see her behaviors and to make judgments accordingly.

There was variety in the way the seven researchers interacted with their first year teacher-subject. Individual researchers interacted with different degrees of frequency with the teachers to whom they were assigned. Some kept regular contact over the phone. There was no standardized method of observing classroom behavior.

The researchers came together on a weekly basis to share their perceptions and discuss various aspects of this study.

## ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Even given the limitations on our study, I believe it does suggest issues to those engaged in designing and conducting follow up studies for the purpose of discovering how well a particular program has prepared its teacher graduates.

First, the teaching performance of first year teachers is not very stable. In our study several of the teachers varied their teaching approaches, their attitudes, and their state of emotional balance a good deal over the year. What this suggests is that in a year marked by instability and change, there is no one best time to send out a questionnaire or a classroom observer.

Second, teachers' subjective judgment of their overall success in teaching or their evaluation of their ability at a particular aspect or skill of teaching often varied a great deal from the judgments of the researcher who had been observing them. For example, in our study a few teachers were, in the judgment of the observers skillful and effective right from the beginning. Sometimes, these teachers were very harsh in their judgments of themselves. On the other hand, some of our first year teachers who were pleased with their own performance were, in the judgment of the observers, either in grave trouble or rapidly approaching it. What this suggests is that the first year teacher's

subjective evaluation of her performance may have very little correspondence to her actual performance or level of skill.

Third, the individual teacher's situation, the context of her teaching, is unique and it is difficult to determine its effect on her professional performance. While several of the teachers in our study left us with the impression that they could succeed in many different teaching situations, others seemed to be gravely affected by their special contextual factors. This suggests that the success or failure of a beginning teacher may depend upon her initial placement. If placement is key, then we must be quite circumspect before we attribute much of the teacher's performance to the uniqueness of a particular preservice training program.

Fourth, the morale, energy level and teaching behavior of many of our teachers seemed strongly affected by what was happening in their private lives. Some of the teachers in our study had

marital stresses and strains, another the death of a parent, at least one a disappointing romance, one went through a divorce, another was the victim of a robbery and assault. It seemed that these events were having a major effect on their teaching. Again, the situational variables from outside their classrooms seemed to interfere with the effect of their training program. Further, this suggests that their response to a questionnaire or their observed teaching performance would be affected by these special events.

Fifth, whether or not first year teacher is invited to teach second year is occasionally mentioned as a criterion of judgment of program effect. Our study could cast doubt on the value of this as a criterion. One of our eighteen teachers quit after five weeks. All of the remaining seventeen were offered contracts the second year. In the view of the observers, some of them were quite ineffective and showed little promise as teachers. There seemed to be little relationship between their performance and their employment.

SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS

Our study of first year teachers raises some other, more general, questions for the designer of follow up studies. First, that in order to provide useful information to program developers, the content of a follow up questionnaire should connect with the reality that is preoccupying the new teachers. Our first year teachers appeared to us to be at many different stages of professional development, from the struggle to survive one day at a time to concern for refining rather sophisticated techniques. This suggests that the follow up study have breadth, spanning concerns from the skills of classroom management to the subtleties of concept formation. The evaluation should be sensitive to such issues as the new teacher's struggle for the courage to make evaluative judgments of her students' work, rather than any particular set of skills of evaluation.

Second, and related to the above, the follow up instrument may reflect the assumption that the first year teacher's energies are being

devoted to acquiring and testing new skills and competencies. In fact, as I have suggested elsewhere (1979), the real task of of first year teachers may be simply to become a second year teacher. It may be that the major energies of the first year teacher are devoted simply to learn to fit in with the rest of the staff and to acquire the operational norms of that particular work setting. For many teachers, the motto of the first year may not be "becoming a teacher" but "going along with the system."

Third, people doing follow up studies may need to establish multiple definitions of first year teachers. Our encounter with the first year teachers in and out of our study suggests that multiple induction patterns may be developing. Besides the standard pattern, whereby a college graduate is immediately hired into a first year teaching position, there are other patterns emerging. For instance, being a district-wide substitute for a year, and then being hired as a regular teacher. The individual who has spent a year substituting in a district may be much more knowledgeable

and at home in their classroom and may be much more skilled at what is for many first year teachers their bete noire, classroom control.

Fourth, there may be special sampling problems in follow up studies of first year teachers. If an institution has a sixty percent return rate of its follow up study instruments from its graduates of the previous year who have obtained teaching positions, they might be quite satisfied with that level of return. However, in the forty percent that have not responded, may be a solid portion of those who are so taxed and overextended by their experience, that they simply cannot give attention, time or energy to something that is so far from their personal survival as a follow up questionnaire. The lack of these respondents in the response pool may badly distort the evaluation of program that emerges.

## SOME INCIDENTAL LEARNINGS

In the process of our study we unexpectedly learned some things, which while they were of

interest to us, may or may not be of interest to those doing follow up studies. The first has to do with the reactions of the teacher-subjects to being involved in the study and to the researchers. In the last five years there has been substantial comment about teachers being tired of being used by researchers. The scenario goes something like this. A fast talking university faculty member mysteriously gains access to some classrooms, collects his data, (in the process upsetting teachers and students), and then going off and, either is never heard from again or writes widely distributed articles where the teachers and administrators look like buffoons and/or facists. In our study we found some initial difficulty in finding a sample of eighteen first year teachers, and we, also, wanted to know their reactions to being a part of the study. We asked them twice during the year to respond to a series of questions about their involvement in the study, their relationship with the researcher and, in general, their level of affect toward the study. They were

told that their responses would not be looked at for over a year. When we finally did look at their responses, we were amazed by three things. First, all sixteen teachers responded to both questionnaires requesting their views on this matter. Second, all sixteen had positive feelings about being in the study and their relationship with the researcher. Third, we had trained ourselves as unobtrusive as possible, simply trying to capture what was there, rather than be any type of intervention. Most of them, nevertheless, found us to be a positive part of their first year. I surmise that while we can take some credit for this reaction it is more an indication of the first year teachers professional isolation and loneliness.

Second, a major impact of this study was on the researchers themselves. The study was funded by the individual researchers. It was not part of anyone's formal university load. It was conducted on top of regular assignments.

No one used it as his dissertation study. Nevertheless, it has been seen by the

researchers as a major part of their doctoral programs and their preparation for careers as teacher trainers and educational researchers. In this sense, it has been an ideal training experience.

Third, our data forced us to question Lagana's finding about the "curve of disenchantment" in which first year teachers' attitudes towards students and their work took a steep dive late in September and did not level off until January. Based on self reports, the teachers in our study show strikingly different profiles of satisfaction from the curve of disenchattment and one first year teacher from the other (see figure 1).

CONCLUSION

Last Spring the National Institute of Education circulated a request for proposals (1978) which contained the staff's views on the induction phase. After reviewing the research, the P stated:

> One result of this effort is a conclusion concurred in by thoughtful observers with a variety of backgrounds and concerns: the conditions under which a person carries out the first year of teaching have a strong influence on the level of effectiveness which that teacher is able to achieve and to sustain over the years; on the attitudes which govern teacher behavior over even a four year career; and, indeed, over the decision whether or not to continue in the teaching profession.

We need to know much more about the first year of teaching and its effects. One important way to do this would be to significantly improve our methods of following up on the graduates of our programs.

## REFERENCES

Fuller, F., and Bown, O. (1975) "Becoming a Teacher" Kevin Ryan (ed.) Teacher Education: The 74th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (part II) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lorg, I., and Thorndike, E.L. (1935) The Influence of Delay in the Aftereffect of a Connection. J. Exp. Psychol. 18 186-194.

Ligana, J. (1970) What Happens to the Attitudes of Beginning Teachers. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc.

National Institute of Education (1978) Request for Proposals (RP-NIE-R-78-0014) Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Ryan, K. (1979) Inside the Black Boxes: The Process of Teacher Education. A paper presented at the Research and Development Center on Teacher Education sponsored conference, on Exploring Issues in Teacher Education: Questions for Further Research, January 10-12, 1979. Austin, Texas.

Thorndike, E.L. (1932) The Fundamentals of Learning. New York: Teachers College.